

LUTHERAN
WOMAN
TODAY

SEPTEMBER
1995

PROCESSED

AUG 1 / 1995

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A
Good
Name

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Megan
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Isabel
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Marion
Jo
Ketman
Norma
Jennifer
Claudia
Katie
Gayle
Nannette
Lindsay
LaVonne
Tamrah
Monica
Nannette
Amelia
Frona
Kay

For Growth in Faith and Mission

Valuing Family

The body of Christ and the community of saints are truly represented in the May LWT.

It has been such a blessing to me. My dear husband died suddenly and unexpectedly April 5 this year. I didn't have a chance to read the issue when it first came out. But in recent days it has taken on a great support role for me. I am taking the time to gradually and fully digest this food for my soul.

*Mary L. Curtis
Findlay, Ohio*

40 Devotions, Yes

I really appreciated the "40 Devotions for Lent" in the April LWT. I read them daily and liked the commentary with each devotion. I did this before eating my breakfast every morning. It would be nice if you repeated this type of thing again in 1996. The Sunday devotions in LWT for April were appreciated, too.

*Dorothy Anderson
Manitowoc, Wis.*

Beans, Yes

Thank you for your support of Women's Bean Project. The article you published [December '94] profiling us generated a big response from your readers which helped make this past Christmas season our best ever.

Your readers are a consistent source of support across the United States, both in sales and in educating others about our work. By helping spread the word about Women's Bean Project you have contributed to a creative, problem-solving solution to the devastating long-term problem of women who are homeless and women living in poverty.

*Jossy Eyre
Women's Bean Project
Denver, Colo.*

Nestingen, Yes

The Bible study this year is wonderful! Dr. Nestingen's down-to-earth homeyness and humor make study pure delight. Please ask to do the Bible study any time

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g. I do find the background
c on the tape makes him diffi-
o understand.

*Shirley Kocher
Hooper, Neb.*

er Yesses

oyed reading a few articles and
g pictures that the LWR quilts
etting to the right places and
used. It inspired me to go to
sewing machine and start
her one.

*Kathleen Sharp
Hartford City, Ind.*

ld like Constance Lovaas Beck
now how much my husband
appreciated "Easter Monday."
LWT].

*Pearl Goldenstein
Lincoln, Neb.*

e Noes

t a waste of four pages in the
h LWT with "What is a
e?" Come on—let's stay with
caring Christian stories and
that type of article for "Ms"
azine.

*Mrs. William (Bonnie)
Anderson
Hoyt Lake, Minn.*

sending an enclosed copy of
s and explanation of what the
says on homosexuality. This
is in regards to Deb Price's
le "LWT Letter to Editor
rates Support" [March LWT].
s quoted as saying Mrs. Huffey
"Jesus says nothing about
sexuality." This is not true, for
ible is the Word of God (Jesus).
also sending Mrs. Huffey these
s. I think it would be good to
*Put a Geranium in Your Hat
Be Happy.* This couple didn't



'Bye and God Bless!

In the six years that Cynthia Mickelson has been with LWT, she's moved from editorial secretary to editorial specialist to assistant editor. Now she's moving on to a full-time master's degree program in Library and Information Science. We miss her already, especially her creativity and leadership. Go in peace, Cindy, serve the Lord. We thank God for you!

accept their gay son, and because
they didn't he later turned his life
around and became a Christian.

*Mrs. Donald Roe
Hazel, S.D.*

*Thank you for the many let-
ters about LWT's new paper.
We are in conversation with
our printer about how to cut
down on the glare. Watch for
future adjustments. —ED.*

The Eighth Commandment

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

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Jennifer Young Jarrett

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Colleen Nordhausen-Garton

This rally day, remember someone who helps you grow in faith.

Giving our lives joyfully

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Kathryn E. Kopf

Between you and me

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Charlotte E. Fiechter

First in a series

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kie M. Steele

eck out the news and

ormation about the *Triennial

vention in the Twin Cities.

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"The Power of the Word"

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September is Literacy Month.

Devotion

"Rain on Me"

Vivian Elaine Johnson

Plop. Splat. Splash.

Bulletin board

How to write, call, order, and compute.

For the benefit of Women of the ELCA participants, articles relating to Women of the ELCA mission areas are marked, at their conclusion, with these symbols:

A=action, **C**=community and **G**=growth.

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Consider the Source...

Kathleen Kastilahn

I hadn't heard Will cry in years. But behind the slammed door of my 17-year-old son's room came the unmistakable sound of sobbing. I stood outside—until I couldn't stand it any longer. I walked in and sat down on the bed.

He'd been benched. Because he wasn't "serious." The punishment was handed out by the varsity baseball coach. The verdict was based on false witness, from the coach's own eyes. He watched a kid have fun on the field, but didn't see his passion. My eyes did. Images of innings from past springs flashed by as I sat and wondered what I could say to my son whose teammates called him "Base" because he stole so many. Will *played* baseball.

But not anymore, he vowed, his temper rising even as his breathing calmed: He would quit.

I'd been warned by other parents who'd watched this coach from the bleachers that he wasn't fair. That he was stubborn. That he'd ride certain kids hard. Many had complained to the athletic director about how he handled the team. Maybe I would, too. But that wasn't what I was wor-

ried about right then. I knew I couldn't change what had happened. I couldn't bring in a slew of Will's past coaches to testify in his behalf. I certainly couldn't undo this hurt and make it better. I could only help Will change how he dealt with it.

"Quitting," I started, "lets a coach believe his own false criticism. 'You're not serious.' It almost makes it become the truth." But my son was losing him.

Then I remembered my father's advice: Consider the source. Don't treat it with the silent contempt it deserves. That got his attention. Will's "Bampa" always has been a giant to him. He's the one who "gave" Will his red hair and taught him to fish. So Will looked at me and listened.

And I told him how often I had repeated that phrase when my sister and I were growing up. I told him often that when the inevitable came our way on the wings of words, we'd be able to say to ourselves, just "consider the source" and regain our perspective, in our rightful place.

ou don't have to let this coach—
 one else who doesn't know or
 the truth about you—define
 ou are,” I told Will. “Consider
 e is and then treat what he
 out you in a way that lets you
 , not his view of you.”
 told him this baseball
 wouldn't be the last per-
 who would hold, or
 , false views about him.
 part of life.

much a part of life, that
 cognized it as one of the
 sic sins we humans reg-
 fall into, and laid down
 y about it: You shall not
 false witness against
 neighbor. Still we break
 aw. And we hurt when
 oken over our backs. It
 s us.

d knows that, too, of
 . In law he decreed that
 bear—not give birth to,
 rry—lies against anoth-
 at is the commandment.
 he acted so that we not
 not suffer, not be bur-
 by—lies against our-
 That is the cross.

No one can truly ever
 take away our good
 name. That name
 we are given as
 we are baptized:
 “William, child of
 you have been sealed by the
 Spirit and marked with the
 of Christ forever.”

never thought to ask Dad,
 recently, where his blunt
 b came from. And he had to
 back seven decades to the
 sale grocery where he worked
 id. The old Irishman he stood

next to—filling orders for dried
 fruits, nuts, and other bulk fancy
 goods—tossed off the phrase, Dad
 recalled, as he dealt with work-a-
 day annoyances.

So that's the source of “Con-

Consider
 the **SOURCE**
 and treat it
 with the silent
 contempt it
 deserves.

sider the source....” Well, that's how
 Dad heard it first. It seems so ordi-
 nary now.

But the proverb gains its power
 from another source: God. God is
 the source of our being. When we
 consider that source, we stand in
 truth. We can withstand false wit-
 ness. We can even play ball—from
 the bench. **G**

*Kathleen Kastilahn, Evanston, Ill.,
 is features editor for The Lutheran.
 She is a member of Wilmette
 Lutheran Church, Wilmette, Ill.*

Stand Against the Tide

Laura Nelson

When I was in eighth grade, I often got a ride home after school from my best friend's mom. She would listen to us talk about the day's events. But when we started to go on about a teacher we couldn't stand, or a classmate who was driving us crazy, she would say to us, "Remember that the thing about gossip is that it always comes back to you."

One of the most painful experiences in life is hearing false and cruel things said about ourselves. It doesn't even matter whether



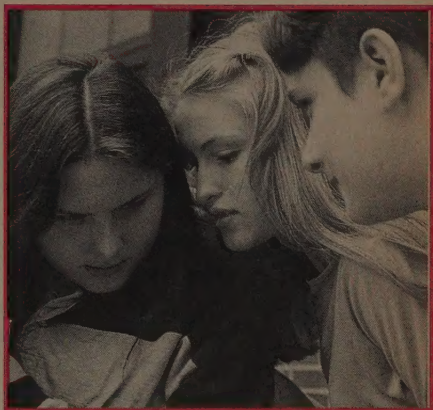
the person speaking is someone we trust or someone we don't. It is particularly painful when it is someone we respect. It is particularly painful when it is someone we care about. Equally painful, however, is discovering that a different way, a different way, is discovering that your flippant and unkind remarks have traveled back to hurt someone you care about.

Yet gossip is so much a part of the fabric of human conversation. Some say this is because it plays an important role in defining a group. Through gossip, members of the group come to know each other and define the group's standards.

By observing the verbal punishment given out for those who violate our group's standards, whether it's wearing the wrong lip ring or the wrong jeans, you can anticipate the same punishment for yourself. One of my friends says she still feels the scars of having been forced by her mother to wear jeans from Sears to middle school. Designer jeans were the only acceptable kind to wear. Gossip is often used as a deterrent. We learn quickly from gossip that, if we want to remain in good standing with the group, it would be good to avoid making these same mistakes.

Middle school is probably the first time we are faced with the task of finding our own way into a group. Our parents and teachers can encourage us, but it is at this point in our lives that ultimately we are on our own in finding a group to be a part of in school. And it isn't always easy.

In middle school we have our first face-scrunching taste of revolving best friends. Awkward romances. Breaking up. Coming back together. Hesitant talents. Being chosen. Being cut. In these experiences, we move in groups like giant caterpillars, each with distinct traits and markings. To be cut apart from the group is all but unthinkable. Moving in groups is natural because God created us to live in community. It is part of the design of the human community. We are born into various groups. We move from play groups to classrooms and little league teams to groups of friends that evolve throughout our lives as our interests and situations change. In groups we find support in our weaknesses and encouragement to push forward with our strengths. And yet, in middle school, we discover that the caterpillar effect of group means that at times we are pulled in a direction that is the opposite of where our conscience and our faith would lead us.



One of the fastest shortcuts in uniting a group is to uncover and create a common enemy. Perhaps that is why middle school classrooms can function like mini-courtrooms. A person's name or behavior comes up in conversation and her case is heard, debated, convicted, and sentenced by a jury of their peers—all within the matter of a few minutes. The instant judgments that determine a person to be in or out leave lingering, wounding labels.

By high school, we have learned the hard fact that the world is not all too rarely looks beneath the surface, or beyond the outward appearances of a person. Yet God looks at not only outward appearance, but looks into our hearts. The Eighth Commandment, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor," says that we are to live by God's standards, not the standards of a group. To go along with the crowd in making judgments about people is to step into the role of judge—a role that is not meant for us.

Martin Luther says in the Large Catechism that it is the sin of humanity that "evil though we are, we cannot tolerate evil spoken of us; we want the golden compliments of the world. Yet we cannot bear to hear the best spoken of others." Luther says that although we live in a world that delights in making condemning judgments, as people of faith we need to stand against the tide, even if it means enduring the disfavor of friends and neighbors.

As we get older, we discover that dealing with gossip going against the crowd don't get any easier. But we also discover that our character can be seen in how we deal with the wrongs of the people around us. The way that people hear us speak to those with whom we are having problems gives them a clear picture of how we will speak of them in times of conflict.

We live in the midst of our many groups, and we can know well the people with whom we live, study, work, and serve. It is all but unavoidable not to rub up against the weak points of the people around us. It reflects well on our character when we refuse to exploit their weaknesses and make their wrongs public knowledge in order to make ourselves look a little better.

Being a part of any group puts us in the role of being a witness to the people around us. Our words have power to wound, but they also have tremendous power to heal. At times, we may speak hard words—to right wrongs, and to warn others of their dangerous behavior. But when we speak those hard words we are commanded—directly, in love and in private—our words are an invitation to forgiveness, and our words can build trust.



The Eighth Commandment demands a great deal from us. Without God, the expectation that we defend and speak well of our neighbors, and explain their actions in the kindest way possible, asks too much of us because what is in our hearts is ultimately what is going to come out of our mouths.

But the good news is that God is not just looking into our hearts, God is healing our hearts. God can even take our words that are intended for harm and create good from them (see Genesis 50:20). When we move from healing hearts, our words can have

an immense impact on a group. Standing up for someone is immediately gratifying for a group, but it is the only path to reconciliation. **C**

Laura Nelson, Madison, Wis., is a pastor at Bethel Lutheran Church. She grew up in a family of four sisters who helped each other survive junior high.



Bad News or *Blessing*?

by M. Blomquist

A short while after I graduated from California Lutheran College in May of 1973, I began working there as an admissions counselor. After spending more than three-quarters of my life as a student, I found it hard to look of myself as an "administrator." Others, I soon learned, would not make that identity shift much more easily than I.

Along with two returning students, I was assigned to a small group for new-student orientation. During one meeting, I happily recounted how good my experience had been at Cal Lutheran and how the "kids" were really great. A returning student glared at me and bellowed bluntly, "We are *not*."

I was both embarrassed and humiliated by the reprimand. Clearly I was no longer one of the "kids," even though I still felt myself to be. In a few short months, I had become one of them, an administrator—not a particularly enviable position after the turmoil of the '60s. But I hadn't

really changed, had I?

The student who corrected me—in retrospect, I admit, rightfully—knew I was a recent graduate. But that didn't matter. What mattered was that I was now an Administrator (with a capital A). All of his perceptions and misperceptions of administrators were loaded onto me simply because of my role. Whatever I did or said was suspect because of my job.

This story comes to mind now because it seems that often we assume the worst of those in any kind of position of authority. Teachers, pastors, church administrators, politicians, and others are fair game for everything from subtle put-downs to blatant lies. We easily pass on what we learn from "those in the know," whether or not they in fact *know* anything.

Why do we do this? Why do we have such a strong tendency to put down, belittle, and talk about others? It shows up everywhere—in newspapers and on talk shows, in humor and advertising, on the floors of Congress and of grocery stores, at home, at school, at play—even at

church. Without thinking, we label one acquaintance “crazy,” a supervisor “workaholic,” a child’s peer “slow,” church officials “liberal,” “conservative,” “un-Christian,” whatever else has negative connotations for us or with whom we are talking.

We buttress our labels and opinions with rationalizations, misinformation, gossip, and, at times, lies. Whether driven by jealousy, low self-esteem, or the desire to command attention or be one of the crowd, the result is the same: We bear false witness and diminish the presence of the Holy in the world.

In his commentary on the Eighth Commandment in the Large Catechism, Martin Luther writes, “It is a

We buttress our labels and opinions with rationalizations, misinformation, gossip, and, at times, lies.

common vice of human nature that one would rather hear evil than hear the truth about [one’s] neighbor.... We cannot tolerate [that] which is spoken of us unless we want the good compliments.

whole world. Yet we cannot bear to hear the best spoken of others.”

“Bad news sells,” the adage goes. In a somewhat different way, that is what Luther says as well. But as people of faith, we are not called to share the bad news but the good news. What might this mean for us as we talk of our neighbors—both those we know and those we do not? What news might we share as we talk about people in our workplaces, colleagues, family or friends, immigrants, political “enemies,” or the poor?

We sometimes have the tendency to think of the Ten Commandments as bad news—all those “thou shalt not”s. Most of us don’t like to be told what we should do or what *not* to do. Perhaps one of the reasons we treat the commandments indifferently, or assume that they only apply to other people—“bad” people—and not to us.

But perhaps part of the reason we struggle with the commandments is that we don’t see that at heart they are an invitation to life—a life lived in harmony with the Lord. The Eighth Commandment, for example, is quite clear about what it commands us *not* to do. But perhaps what is

is what it invites us to *do*—and this is where the good comes in.

Certainly the commandment doesn't invite us to lie by saying good things that aren't true or to be Pollyannas who ignore that there is brokenness and evil in this world that need healing and righting. But what it does invite us to do, Jesus so often did, is to evoke the wholeness and holiness that are God's will for all people.

Have you ever known someone who gave you confidence and courage, who could see capabilities and capacities in you that you couldn't see, someone who always made you feel better about yourself? We say these people bring out the best in others. This, I think, is the invitation of the Eighth Commandment—to bring out the best in others and in our world. Instead of being bearers of bad news, we are to be bearers of good news, bestowers of blessing.

Some years ago I read a definition of *blessing* that consists of two parts: "to challenge and nourish me: 'In blessing we express gratitude to God for the divine form inherent in other persons.' We ask God in effect to bring this form to fullness" (see Muto, *Celebrating the Single Life: A Spirituality for Single Persons in Today's World*, Doubleday & Company, 1990).

The flip side, then, of blessing is this: You shall not bear false witness... You shall not curse others with words, giving thanks to the Divine Presence in them and praying that the Holy may be brought to fullness in and through them.

Words are potent and powerful. If nothing else in my long career with the student long ago, I did learn that. And this is what the Eighth Commandment tells us as well. It challenges us to use the power of our words not for harm but for wholeness, not to bear bad news but to bestow blessing. As children of God, we are invited to wholeness and, through our words and every word and action, we are to extend that invitation to others as well. **C**

M. Blomquist works in the area of spiritual direction as a writer, speaker, workshop / retreat facilitator; and spiritual director. She is the author of Morning Till Dawn: Awakening to Life in Times of Struggle (Upper Room Books, 1994) and lives with her husband in Berkeley, Calif.

As people of faith, we are not called to share the bad news but the GOOD news.



Word Power

Gwen Carr

"If you can't say something good about someone, don't say anything at all."

We all have grown up hearing this advice and perhaps even followed it ourselves. It challenges us to use words to lift up and not to tear down. To fully comprehend this statement, it is important to acknowledge the power of the spoken word in our society.

We are powerfully influenced and shaped by what we are told about ourselves from childhood. These messages often form the basis of our concepts about who we are, what we are capable of accomplishing, and how we see the world around us. They are essentially the foundation of our self-esteem. An example might be the many little girls who are told they are not good at math...and the many women who avoid technical fields as a result of this message! We also know that

adults spend millions of dollars in therapy to identify such negative messages and to replace them with positive ones.

Current trends in politics

Words can be powerful weapons that destroy lives and divide nations.

us another perspective on the impact of words. We live in a world when being critical is a liberal or a conservative immediately evoke mental sets and assumptions expected behaviors. These behaviors discourage us from critical thinking and meaningful

dialog and are replaced by convenient prepackaged judgments that form barriers to community.

Words—while in and of themselves neutral—when used inappropriately can be powerful weapons that destroy lives and divide nations. Words can give life engendering love, trust, faith, hope—and can also destroy life diminishing, devaluing, and destroying.

Perhaps this is why God chose to address the use of words as part of the Ten Commandments. If it is true that the first four commandments address issues of honoring God, then the next six address how we honor God's creation. Taken

in that context, the Eighth Commandment deals directly with the ways we dishonor God by showing a lack of respect for our neighbors—lying about them, bearing false witness.

This, perhaps, is not a tradition-

ary way of thinking about the Eighth Commandment, but it has helped me to bring the law into focus in my relationship with God. In fact, this commandment takes on greater significance when seen from this perspective: It is not "good enough" simply to follow the law of not lying about my neighbor; we are also told to honor God's higher call of using words to affirm and to build up.

How differently we might treat one another if we truly believed our neighbor's honor, reputation, character, and self-esteem were all gifts from God. Would we be as quick to slip, speculate, spread rumor and innuendo? Could we stand silent if God's creation was being disrespected?

Let's go one step farther. This commandment also implies that we should be straightforward and honest with each other. We would be free to expect that all our relationships will be without conflict. After

all, do we not all sin and fall short of the glory of God? The important thing is that by honoring each other and looking for opportunities to build up each other, we are less apt to fall into negative behaviors, even when we are disappointed with one

another. Many of us have learned to give each other the silent treatment, using the excuse that "if we can't say something good, we won't say anything at all." Such behavior can be equally as damaging.

God calls us to love and honor

each other as a part of creation. This call is neither passive nor easy, for our society pushes us in the opposite direction by preying on the very worst in us. The past few years have spawned a host of talk shows, movies, and books designed to give credence to chaos in the form of gossip, innuendo, malice, and slander. It is hard to tell fact from fiction when the line is so often blurred with half-truths to sell ads and air time.

We can no longer trust what we say to each other. In fact, we have become so accustomed to being "lied to" that we are beginning to believe that the truth does not exist. Think of how demonic that sounds.

And yet, in the midst of all of this, God calls us to represent truth in these times. Certainly, if not us, then who? It begins with being truthful about who we are, and how we relate to God, and then to each other, on a daily basis. It means trying to see the world as God sees it, and being a light in the midst of

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darkness. It means seeking to find the best in ourselves and others, and not collapsing under the weight of uncertainty, disappointment, or conflict. It means honoring God and each other in all aspects of our lives: as we make decisions about how we spend our time and our money; which issues we support; what we stand for and against; when to speak up and when to be silent.

If only it were as simple as keeping the specific law as outlined in the Ten Commandments. If only it were a matter of not lying. But along with the law, we also believe in grace. And it is in the context of

God's grace for us that we now liberated to look upon each other with the same measure of grace, precious gifts of God to be valued and honored. **C**

Gwen Carr is a member of Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Salem, Ore. She served as the church-wide president of Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America from 1990 to 1993.



Jesus and the Workplace

How does Jesus fit into the workplace? It can seem so difficult to reflect our religious beliefs in our words and actions while at work.

Personally, I want to share God's good news and be a living example of what God's good grace has done for me, for each of us. And so I thought about ways we can, in the workplace, be an example for Christ life.

We can enjoy ourselves and our co-workers. Try commenting on the positives in each person rather than the negatives. Avoid the gossip circle for something more constructive. Vow to be a person in your workplace who can be depended upon. Be a morale booster. Look for ways to improve situations rather than grumble or complain about them.

Let us listen for opportunities to share our faith story. In many small ways we can, by example, share the good news of Jesus Christ. We can, by our witness, sow seeds for the Holy Spirit to nurture. **G**

*Susan Shoup
Port Orchard, Wash.*

VERITA and the BEST CONSTRUCTION CREW

Chris and Bob Sitze

Several months had elapsed since Verita and her friends had completed their study of the Ten Commandments. Their eyes had been opened, their spirits were soaring with possibilities, and now they wanted to do something about what they had learned. Verita and her Bible study group joined a few more friends in a new, unofficial organization, "The Best Construction Crew."

Verita Flores

When we studied the Eighth Commandment closely, we felt pretty bad about ourselves. First, we thought about all the ways we sin in our talking and thinking about other people. Second, we felt helpless in always trying to avoid these sins, as though avoidance of evil made somehow holier. But when we read the last part of the commandment's meaning, we realized that there were no things we could do to obey the commandment. And that's when we decided to start a new group in our congregation. We named it after an old way of understanding the end of Verita's explanation of the Eighth Commandment, "putting the best construction on everything."



Tracy Awle

When Verita first asked me to join this group, I didn't understand why "The Best Construction Crew" would be important. But now I understand: There's so much hateful, spiteful speech going on these days. So many people seem to be angry with their words. So many folks look for evil in every word of other people. So many good things are being destroyed carelessly. Our crew is going to help people around us do more than avoid disobeying this commandment; we're going to help them see the blessed side of this command from God. How to build up God's world with our words!





Jacques Hammer

When Verita asked me to tell her my honest opinion about being part of this group, I was flattered. A lot of people at church think I'm just an old grouch. Maybe the way I look, or maybe all they see is the hard-boiled part of me. I wish they knew how hard I try to "tell the truth in love." In some situations it may be hard to make my truth-telling as loving, but that's the way I feel down deep.



Peg Board

I'm excited to be part of "The Best Construction Crew." I'm going to be working on building up the image of the younger generation among older people like myself. I know that it's hard to understand the young people at our church sometimes, and I've been the first to complain in the past. But even though I'm still not sure about young people nowadays, I'm going to spend some time talking with some of them, listening to what they think is important. That doesn't mean that I'll agree with everything they're doing, but at least I'll be trying to explain their actions in the kindest way when others talk about them.



Rusty Naylor

When Verita asked me to join her crew, I wasn't sure. It's hard for me to like people different from me. I know it isn't right, but it's pretty hard for me to accept viewpoints that I think the Bible says are wrong. My world is a kind of a dangerous place—crime, hurting people, families falling apart—and I don't really know if I can be that accepting. But Verita..., well she's pretty persuasive. "Try it for awhile," she said, "and see if you can learn a new way of thinking." So now I'm part of "The Best Construction Crew," even though it's hard for me.



Molly Bolte

I'm going to be part of Verita's crew all right, but without some difficulty. I really don't want to be one of those people who never says anything unless it's nice. My goodness, things around this church aren't always nice, and the way we treat each other isn't good. If I'm going to be on the crew, there's going to be some demonstration going on, too! Some things will have to be torn down before we can do any construction.

De Zherz

of the things I'm going to try to construct is a method anyone can use to turn around a gossipy conversation. Some phrases, some light comments, some body language, some good questions that will stop a group from going on an unknown person, or someone who isn't present. Maybe I'll start with, "How well do you know this person?" or, "My experience with her has actually been very good," or, "Isn't it possible that his motives were really the opposite of what you're saying?" It might be to see if I can pick apart the petty patter of some of the things I'm with.



De Dherr

not sure if I want to be in Verita's group. All during Bible study I kept thinking, "These people in this group don't know how many times I've smiled at them at church and then turned around later in the week and listened to gossip about them without defending them." I still feel guilty about being a gossip consumer. Then again, because I feel so guilty about not defending my friends, maybe "The Best Construction Crew" will be a place where I can apologize and ask for forgiveness. Maybe I'll be the one they'll be building back up?



De Gehrder

This crew is going to accomplish something, we're going to have to start with some good old-fashioned analysis and planning. Where have things fallen apart or relationships deteriorated? Where do we have a chance to change things? I expect that our group is going to face some difficulties. But I trust that we'll also face the Holy Spirit blowing the wind of God in our faces, and helping us understand that God's Word for us is always forgiving, always gracious, always upbuilding.



De Logue

De Logue said that "The Best Construction Crew" gradually will encompass the entire congregation. Whatever the needs of the people, God used them as small tools, bits of building material, skills and other gifts from which this congregation constructed a place where the gospel is proclaimed in truth and deed to this very day. **CGA**

De Logue and Bob Sitze have co-authored books, articles, curriculum, and devotional materials for more than 20 years. They live in Evanston, Ill., and are grateful that God has not yet finished building them.

To Tell the Truth

Adele Stiles Resmer

The Value of Truth-Telling

A full and enriching life together requires the living out of a number of important values and principles, including truth-telling. There are several benefits to telling the truth. When there is a good match between who we are and how we represent ourselves to others, we feel better about ourselves. When we are truthful about what we believe and do, our sense of self-worth is strengthened.

At the same time, when we are truthful about who we are and what we believe and do, trust is built among us. While we may not like or even appreciate some of the people with whom we live and/or work, we can trust those who are truthful about who they are and what they believe and do. Trust is an important foundation for life together, whether in a family, workplace, or the larger society.

Life together is further enhanced because truth-telling allows us to be accountable to each

other. Telling the truth about ourselves means revealing our strengths, and successes; our shortcomings, weaknesses, and failures. Some of what we do serves us and others well; other things are helpful or harmful. Our willingness to accept both praise and blame, voluntarily given, strengthens us and communities in which we live and work.

Truth-telling, however, can be a risky business. When we speak the truth, we make ourselves vulnerable. We expose ourselves. Sometimes that vulnerability is respected; other times it is abused.

The Conditions for Truth-Telling

For Christians, the truth is spoken in love (Ephesians 4:15). We are not to use the truth as a weapon to harm each other, but as an instrument to benefit each other. Telling the truth in love means telling the truth, only when necessary, and with a concern for the truth, or not saying it at all.

g at all. How do we know which
onse serves the truth? It's the
onse that is spoken with the
nt to love and build up, rather
to harm or break down.

Second, Christians speak only a
ial truth. Why is this? Because
ecognize that the only absolute
n is God. Our truth is partial
distorted by sin (1 Corinthians
2). This is not a reason to
adon a pursuit of the truth.
wing that our truths are
ial and distorted simply
oduces an appropriate
unt of humility into our
king. It keeps our reliance
od, who is the only one who
vs for certain if the truth has
served.

Without love and humility, we
people up with our truth and
e only ourselves. With love and
ility, we build up possibilities
een us and serve the truth.

Limits of Truth-Telling

h-telling does not exist in isola-
It exists, often in tension, with
ost of other values such as
ect for persons, nurturing
an life, justice, beneficence, con-
tiality, and preventing harm.
n one or more of these other
es take precedence, we may be
from the obligation to tell the

For example, we would not tell a
and where to find his wife,
u we know she is hiding to
e his battering. Truth-telling is
ted in order to prevent harm.
e would not insist on telling a
nt their life-threatening diag-

nosis if they come from a culture
that expects not to be told such
information. Truth-telling is set
aside in order to respect persons.

Good, sometimes life-saving,
reasons may exist for not telling the
truth. However, because truth-
telling is such an important value
among us, those who want to set it
aside must always be prepared to

**Truth-telling can be
risky business. When we
speak the truth, we make
ourselves vulnerable.**

argue why that is necessary in this
particular situation. Otherwise, the
weight remains with telling the
truth. Despite the challenges
involved in serving the truth, it is
worth the effort and the risk. It
strengthens us, builds trust
between us and keeps us appropri-
ately accountable to each other. C

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Lutheran
Church in
America's
Division for
Church in
Society.*



To *Create* or to **Destroy**

Grace Adolphsen Brame

We human beings have the awesome power to create or to destroy, to give life or to kill. We can choose to maim or try to heal, to uplift or put down, to encourage or discourage, to mend or to break. We can be part of a problem or part of its solution. We have a choice between power used for others and power used for ourselves. And this is as true in the church as it is in families, schools, or societies.

Power is not evil. It is necessary for life. It was created for good. How to use power is our challenge.

The tongue is most frequently our instrument of power. By the impulses of the heart, it speaks (Matthew 12:34). Whatever comes from the heart, said Jesus, blesses or defiles us as well as our neighbors (Mark 7:20-23, Matthew 15:11). Jesus writes: "...the tongue is a small member" that can be "set on fire by hell." "With it we bless the Lord..., and with it we curse men who are made in the likeness of God" (James 3:5-9).

In regard to the Eighth Commandment, Luther writes in the Large Catechism: "There is nothing...that can do greater good or greater harm, in spiritual or in temporal matters, than this smallest and weakest of [our] members, the tongue."

Perhaps Jesus' strongest words about the tongue come from the Sermon on the Mount: "You have heard it said... 'Thou shalt not murder...' But I say to you...if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You are a fool or a madman,' you will be liable to the hell of fire" (Matthew 5:21-22). Jesus, to destroy by words was murder.

"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me!" We were taught to say it as children. But it is true! Centuries before Jesus, the ancients realized that words were like arrows. Once sent, they lodge in the heart and can only be removed.

It is easier to destroy than to create, and it is far quicker

Consider the example of a reporter building his or her reputation by destroying that of another—permanently. Consider meaning denigration—often cast as “humor.” Consider the erosion of public officials, leaving few role models left to protect.

To many of us, gossip is only a game, a curiosity. We have insensitivity about what we are helping to destroy. But the end word and the lie are cannibalistic. They feed on the life of another.

Yet attempting to say nothing unkind about anyone can cause institutions to fall apart, inadequate leadership to collapse, and falsehood, by omission of truth, to be taught. Let us bear. Evil must be exposed. We are not asked to be inappropriately nice. Instead, we are commanded not to bear false witness. Without truth and trust, society will disintegrate. So will homes and schools. So will our churches.

What can we do?

We must gain the ability to disagree without destroying, to discuss without belittling. We need to recognize our power and choices.

Luther writes in his Large Catechism: “Besides our own life, our wife or husband, and our temporal property, we have no more treasure which is indispensable to us, namely, our honor and good name,...for it is intolerable to live in public disgrace and contempt.”

How very true! We are powerless without a good name.

We need each other. We are guardians of each other’s honor. In the body of Christ, the church, we are called to support each other. We are asked “to provoke one another to love and good works,” to encourage one another (Hebrews 10:24, 25).

All this is a matter of giving life. And isn’t this the meaning of life—to give life? It always has been for God! God is our creator. Jesus came to give life and to give it abundantly (John 10:10). The Holy Spirit, “the Lord and giver of life,” eternally inspires and heals, liberates and guides,

always truth and reminds us of what matters.

And God has called us to the same magnificent privilege: to give life. We cannot do it for ourselves. But there is no one who cannot do it for another.

Alleluia! **CGA**

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The Hidden Promise

James A. Nestingen



Session 9
A Word in Due Season
Study Text: Exodus 20:16
Story Text: Psalm 41

The Eighth Commandment **You shall not bear false witness** **against your neighbor.**

What does this mean? We are to fear and love God so that we do not betray, slander, or lie about our neighbor, but defend him and speak well of him, and explain his actions in the kindest way.

Memory Text

"...Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34).

Overview

After life, faithful friends, and some property, the most important gifts we have are a good name and truthful speech. A good name opens doors; truthful speech gives us a reliable sense of what is going on around us. God commands us to be careful with our language, to respect one another's names, and to speak the truth in love.

Opening

O Lord our God, as you have taken hold of our hearts in the abundance of your grace, help us to open our mouths accordingly that our words will faithfully serve you and our neighbors. Amen.

The Story

Sometimes the best way to see what is at stake in a commandment is to talk to a victim—somebody who has suffered the results of

g broken. Psalm 41 gives us such an opportunity. It is written person who has gotten sick, among other things, on other people talk.

The psalm begins with the promise of the gospel. Just as y's words in the Magnificat celebrate God's special concern for poor and cast-off (Luke 1:46-55), so in Psalm 41:1-3, the mist recites all that God has done.

Read verses 1-3 and make a list of the
s—the action words.

at does God do for those who are suffering?

y would God seem to have such a special inter-
n those experiencing loss?

ing invoked the promises of God, in verse 4 the psalmist pro-
ds to the complaint. A poor, sick man, he was having his own day
ouble. And so he did what the Second Commandment requires:
upon God for help. As he did, the psalmist laid bare his heart.

The first thing the psalmist did was to confess his sins.
re may be conflict situations where one party is fairly innocent,
usually when there is conflict, everybody involved has some-
g to confess. The psalmist knew God's graciousness and so he
w there was no use in pretending he wasn't implicated in his
culties, at least partially.

The psalmist didn't name his sin, but he
w whom he sinned against—God. How are our
s against our neighbors also sins against God?

at makes a confession of sin so important at
point?

After confessing his sin against God, the psalmist begins to describe the difficulty he is having with his neighbors. Sometimes he describes very harshly; they are his “enemies” (verse 6), among them a person who was once the psalmist’s best friend (verse 9).

Generally, it seems that decent people aren’t supposed to have enemies. But the trouble the psalmist describes with his friends isn’t so unusual. They come to visit him on his sickbed, they talk to him in empty phrases, and then break his confidences (verse 6). They whisper among themselves about him (verse 7), and they talk casually about his death (verse 8).

That’s the way it usually works. The people who cause the most hurt are generally very close to home—in the family, at work, in the community—and their words are their weapons.

This is the significance of the memory text. If we are ever heard breaking a confidence or saying something derogatory about another, we’re likely to protest: “I didn’t mean it. I didn’t realize it was confidential. I was only kidding.” But Jesus knows that there is a direct connection between our hearts and our mouths. In our words, even those spoken jokingly, have a way of revealing our anxieties, fears, and resentments. So Jesus underscores the Eighth Commandment, telling us to keep a lid on our mouths.

But Jesus goes even further, as he always does, reaching deep inside of us. Jesus reassures us with the word of forgiveness and asks us to do the same—even, and especially at home and among those closest to us. Knowing how difficult this is for us, he teaches us to ask for help in forgiving, in the Fifth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer: “Forgive us our sins as you forgive those who sin against us.” While broken confidences, words of frustration, fear, and hate make enemies, words of grace open up a new day. Jesus is at work helping us even before we ask.

3. How might the psalmist’s neighbors have reacted to his description of them (verses 6-9)?

Is his bitterness unusual for this kind of situation?

verse 5, the psalmist indicates what is really at stake in the conflict. He is concerned about his life, though he appears fairly confident that he will recover (verses 10-13). What bothers him is what is happening to his name.

One source of his concern is the possibility of dying and being forgotten. Before Christ brought the hope of the resurrection, a memory was all a person left behind—when a person died, her name died.

But there is something more to this concern. You can die if you substitute identity, reputation or credit rating for your word name.

What's in a name—a reputation?

Some of the ways your name is a passport for your reputation.

Why could the “death” of a person's name inflict a living death upon the victim?

The Eighth Commandment

There is more to the psalm, but this is enough discussion to see some of the major purposes of the Eighth Commandment. Our names get caught up in our names. A good name is literally life-giving. A person can move about freely, anticipating people's respect, and trust. A bad name becomes a living death. It follows a person around, destroying the confidence and respect of others. By blocking trust, a bad name blocks a person's way into the future.

Luther's explanation of the commandment lists three sins in which this commandment is commonly violated. *Calumnies* is what happened to the psalmist after people visited him. His visitors broke confidence in a way that put him at a disadvantage. *Slander* is a false report or misrepresentation that damages another person's reputation. *Lies* are falsehoods.

5. How do these three sins make a person's name perish?

Name some common examples of each of the

The Eighth Commandment has another purpose as well, that goes deeper than simply restricting us from betraying, slandering, or lying. Though we often express frustration about language, we must use words to do so. Words are the medium of life. It is through our language that God speaks to us, and it is with words that we make and maintain relationships with the people and the world in which we live.

Luther used to say that liars have to have good memories. One distortion usually requires another and another still another, until finally one lie has spun a web of deceit. Things become so distorted that no one can be sure of what is right, wrong, up, down, or inside out. The Eighth Commandment calls us to speak the truth between us.

6. How might advertising, for instance, distort the truth in public life?

What are some examples of commonly used methods of distortion?

The Promise

Having promised to be your God, and having made provisions for God's own name (in the Second Commandment), God wants to protect your name as well. In fact, Jesus is especially particular about it, tightening up the Eighth Commandment to increase the protection.

In Matthew 5:21-22, we read that those who curse someone a fool will be liable to the hell of fire. In the light of Christ's life-giving grace, harsh words can be seen for what

really are: death dealing. So Jesus reminds us that even insults and quick name-calling not only break the Eighth commandment, but also the Fifth—they are a form of killing.

How can these seemingly small and non offenses be considered so wrong?

Where does the memory text (Matthew 12:34) say these offenses begin?

The promise carries us into the positive side of the Eighth commandment. For God is concerned about more than protecting. God wants to make sure that we each seek to *contribute* to one another's good names. When neighbors are quick to offend one another, for example, rumors have a hard time getting started. Speaking well of another makes everyone feel more loved and valued for their gifts.

Interpreting one another's actions generously, or "in the kindest way," as the catechism puts it, is especially helpful. Conflicts often start with mind reading: Each side becomes convinced that they know the other's motives and that those motives are nasty. Anticipating good and looking for good reasons to believe the best can stop trouble in its tracks, putting a new basis under a relationship.

Give some concrete examples of defending the neighbor, speaking well of her, and interpreting her actions in the kindest light, as you or people you know have experienced it.

What have the results been?

What does this mean?

Life is more complicated than commandments. When some of the people in your own house can become your enemies, or when close friends betray you, it is often hard to know how the Eighth Commandment applies.

For this reason, Jesus has provided a method for dealing with conflict. Matthew 18:15-17 is that plan. The first person to talk to about trouble is the one who is the source of difficulty. If that fails, another neighbor should come and talk so that things can be clarified, or the offender has another chance. It is only after two such visits that a person should take the issue to the community. If the congregation makes a reasonable effort and the person still won't come to terms, may be legitimate and even necessary to seal that person off so that daily contact is avoided altogether or kept to the strictest minimum.

This is a very painful thing for any believer. But among sinners, including those of deep faith, relationships can become so destructive that mutual love and service are impossible to restore. Those who have been through a divorce or some other deep conflict, for example, may find any form of contact uncomfortable—even intolerable. They may need the help of a counselor, pastor, or mediator to express their feelings and air their grievances. Throughout such a journey of pain, one can depend on Christ's strength and forgiveness and pray for some future de-escalation of the conflict.

9. How does Jesus' method of dealing with conflict give the benefit of the doubt to the person who is considered to be the cause of the offense?

How does it protect the person who has been offended?

Looking Ahead

After a good name and trustworthy talk, the next gift essential to life is some public confidence. So God says, "I shall not covet"—the Ninth Commandment.

About the Author

The Rev. James A. Nestingen is a popular speaker and author of several books on Lutheran theology. A gifted storyteller of faith, Dr. Nestingen is a professor of church history at Lutheran Theological Seminary in St. Paul, Minn.

A Painter's Prayer

Marj Leegard

venly Father, let
paint a picture
will define a
d. A picture so
r and true that
after it will be
, "Church? The
re says it all."

I will put blue on
palette for the
White and gray
he tall church on

hilltop. Darkest green for the fir
s that stretch past the steeple's
ht. There will be yellow for the
shining on the gravestones that
o closely by.

Or shall I place my easel inside
church that leaves a pane of
s without the stained-glass
st's touch so that the mountains
be seen? Or should I go to the
veld in Africa and sketch the low
e walls with roofs that barely
r the name?

Or might I choose the chapel
ounded by science and history
music and students? And, too,
e is the room in an office build-
where worship shapes the day
the deliberations.

I have gray on my palette. I
d put on canvas the inside of the
rch with walls of cement slabs,
gh edges of cement extruding
n the places where workmen
d the forms. Then I remember



the little Camp Fire
girl, whose church
this wasn't, saying,
"But this isn't pret-
ty!" And the answer
from our tour-guide
priest, "Ah, but you
should see it when
the people come with
all their colors and
their smiles. Then it
is beautiful."

Oh Lord, you know I can't paint
people. They won't stay still while I
shut one eye and measure with my
thumb and finger as if I know what
I am doing. People move from the
inside of the church to homes and
apartments and hospitals and
benches in deserted parks. They go
to work and school and gatherings of
others like themselves. They are
only here long enough to be sent
there by your call. And if I take my
brushes to follow them, they point to
people's needs, and wonder at my
idleness.

No matter how many colors and
shapes and shadows and canvasses I
use, I cannot paint church. God,
church is yours to define.

Include me in your definition,
for Jesus' sake. Amen. **C**

*LWT columnist Marj Leegard is
from Detroit Lakes, Minn.*

Brief Prayers on News Items

Sonia C. Groenewold

◆ Your daily prayer list

As you watched TV news shows, heard radio reports, or read the papers in the last few days, which stories tugged at your heart? Why not add those people to your prayer list? You might pray for:

- Families of victims of the Oklahoma City bombing and the Tokyo gas attack—and for those whose anger and hatred fuel such atrocities.
- The people of Rwanda, Haiti, Chechnya, Croatia, and other places where life is difficult and violent.
- People sandwiched between the competing needs of children and aging parents.
- Children, youth, and others who are returning to school to continue their studies.

◆ Prisoners raise funds for the hungry

Last September and again this year, the women inmates at Dwight Correctional Center in Kankakee (Ill.) Minimum Security Unit walked five kilometers inside the prison. Twenty-five percent of the proceeds benefited local hunger relief, and the remaining 75% went through Church World Service for disaster relief, food aid, and development throughout the world. Church

Women United of Illinois, Church World Service, and the Illinois Department of Corrections joined hands as sponsors.

Be the strength and mainstay of these generous women, God of love.

◆ Hospital on critical list

The Lutheran hospital in Jerusalem, Augusta Victoria, faces a threat to its existence because of funding cuts and uncertainty of the peace process. It is in a battle to get permits for staff who work in the West Bank, and the constant threat that groups in Israel will take over the hospital's prime real estate.

O God, show us how we can be part of the solution for places such as this.

◆ Evangelism by the numbers

St. Andrew Lutheran Church in Portsmouth, Va., initiated "Gathering of the Seventy," an evangelism program where 70 members signed up to do home visits in the community. Some visit unchurched, some call on those who have visited the congregation, others call on shut-ins or people in the hospital. A seven-foot board in the library keeps track of the details.

Help us to realize, Nurtured by God, that evangelism can be as simple as showing love and sharing God's work in our lives.

Sonia C. Groenewold is senior editor of The Lutheran.

A Prison Congregation

The Community of St. Dysmas is a congregation much like other Evangelical Lutheran Church in America congregations. There is regular worship and a church council. Several women participate in the men of the ELCA Bible study in Lutheran Woman Today. This 10-year-old congregation is unique because of its location—inside the Maryland Correctional Institute in Baltimore, Md.

"The Community of St. Dysmas is in two locations," says the Rev. Charles Frederick, pastor of the congregation. "Maryland Correctional Institute in Baltimore is a men's medium security unit. The Maryland Correctional Institution for Women is a women's facility—listed as minimum security because it is the only women's unit in the system. Both are in Baltimore, Maryland. Though separated by walls, razor wire, and about a half-mile distance, these two groups form the congregation. Each part has its own council and program schedule."

The Delaware-Maryland Synodical Women's Organization provided 30 subscriptions to Lutheran Woman Today and copies of *Lutheran Book of Worship*. Pastor Frederick notes that "several women on the inside have organized small Bible study groups in the housing units."

A prison congregation provides a means for Christians to follow Christ's exhortation to visit the imprisoned. Every week up to 10 people from neighboring congregations come for worship and fellowship with inmate members of The Community of St. Dysmas.

The inmate councils make programmatic decisions, as does any church council. For example, the women's council donates money earned from the sale of afghans and other projects to organizations such as the Center of Ruth and family shelters that assist abused or battered women.

Who is St. Dysmas?

Dysmas is the name given by the early church to the repentant thief on the cross next to Jesus. While sharing death and execution with our Lord, Dysmas asked to be remembered when Jesus came into his glory. Jesus replied, "Today you will be with me in Paradise."

Prison congregations and ministries often use the name St. Dysmas because of Jesus' promise to this convicted criminal.

—Ed Nesselhuf

Studies suggest that, after release, St. Dysmas members are less likely to end up back in prison than nonmembers. "It is clear that providing a witness of the gospel in our prisons can have a positive effect upon the future lives of those who receive the good news," notes Pastor Frederick.

Below, three members of the Community of St. Dysmas, inmates in the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women, share their thoughts.

Grateful to the Church

Worshiping at St. Dysmas Church is a never-ending story for me. I love the church, the congregation, the pastor (Charles Frederick), and the outside visitors and church volunteers with all my heart. St. Dysmas is a sense of belonging. I lived a tormented life as a drug addict, alone, desperate, selfish, and self-seeking. St. Dysmas is my family. On the prison campus grounds, going through daily routine, I can quickly recognize other members. I always give the sign of peace (two fingers). When troubled, I can always share my problems with another member.

Prison Congregations of America

The Community of St. Dysmas in Maryland was founded by the Rev. Ed Nesselhuf as a mission congregation of the American Lutheran Church. Pastor Nesselhuf has since been instrumental in developing St. Dysmas congregations in South Dakota, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania. Several other states are in the process of forming prison congregations. For more information about Prison Congregations of America, contact: Pastor Ed Nesselhuf, Director, P.O. Box 415, 1 E. Main St., Vermillion, SD 57069-0415 Phone: 1-800-417-6692 •

I look forward to the day of church service. I know that I will see my Christian sisters there and I am filled with a sense of pride as I start scurrying around setting chairs and equipment, passing hymnals and reading assignments, preparing for the service to start. We all work together with one accord to make our service the high point of our weekly activities. At our service, no one is left out. No matter how big the problem, or if you want to give thanks, you can do so with our prayer list that is passed around and then read during service.

Our pastor is very kind and understanding. More understanding than I can be at certain times, and he always tries to "pass it on." The most important lesson that I've learned from St. Dysmas is sharing. I try now to use the best of my ability to share with others the love and forgiveness of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

—Alice Metcalf

How I Felt Then and How I Feel Now

Just like I had no one,
beside or near.
My father, and then my mother,
said, "I hate this year."
I thought I almost lost it all
I gave my God a call.
I sat up, and then looked up
I heard a voice that said to me,
"I'm getting stronger daily
I start my day with a prayer,
God has been so good to me
One day he'll set me free.
I have destroyed months of this year,
I know things a body and mind should fear,
Smoking, stealing, drinking, and lying.
O God, give me a chance for living.

—Pamela Bryant

Hope for the Future

My incarceration came during my twilight years. That term implies partial darkness and lateness in life. Both are correct. Incarceration prisoned my body, and captivity gave me the time to think and heal. At 62, I've spent five Christmas and New Year holidays behind bars. Living in the midst of pain, loss, and sin, the necessity of my Savior's lowly birth, sacrificial death, and liberating resurrection have become crystal clear to me.

Three aspects of my confinement have contributed to my well-being. First of all, I am able to obtain work in one of the state-run laundry shops. Since there are not enough jobs for the inmates, this is a blessing. The small



Pastor Charles Frederick speaks with an inmate who attends the Community of St. Dysmas congregation at the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women.



Inmate Sheron Sweitzer embraces another church-goer during a service at the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women.

amount that I earn is enough to purchase my personal items from our commissary. The state does not supply any needs outside room and board.

Secondly, I began attending St. Dysmas worship services on Saturday nights. Lutheran Bible studies also are offered every week on Tuesday nights. Pastor Charles Frederick leads informative and caring church services. Many guest ministers, including Bishop George Mocko (Delaware-Maryland Synod), have spoken to us. Volunteer musicians lead us in singing praises to God—even birds in cages need to sing. Pastor Frederick supplies us with Lutheran magazines, which are in great demand. Several women have formed small Bible study groups using material supplied in Lutheran Woman Today magazine.

Finally, by affording myself the opportunity to take college courses, as the result of receiving Pell grants, I have expanded my horizons, freed my bound-up psyche, and found hope for the future.

All my life, I've searched for God. Now I have found him in prison. He is mine and I am his. Like the apostle Paul, I feel compelled to share my joy. In the book of Jeremiah I also have taken comfort in the following verse, "When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).

—Betty Smith

A Prison Ministry

Transformed by Forgiveness

Glenda Naegele

"I've heard about God all my life but I never knew God's love until I met you, Mrs. Glenda." What I had done to flesh out God's love for this young inmate of a California Youth Authority prison? I had brought him a birthday cake, pad of writing paper, and a pen. I had his fellow Bible study students say, "Happy Birthday," he explained, tearing up his eyes, that this was his first birthday party, ever.

Through the teaching of God's Word, the love of Jesus touches and illumines hardened hearts, and Mariposa Prison Ministry experiences the transformation of angry, violent, and addicted lives. A person who hurts another has also been hurt. The healing of both hurts begins with receiving, believing, and sharing Christ's forgiveness.

Internalizing the forgiveness of Christ ("God forgives me") begins a process that, like a beautiful butterfly emerging from the ugly cocoon, transforms lives filled with abuse, rejection, and hopelessness. Then, warmed by Christ's love and the care and concern of Christ's people, new life and new purpose begin to flow into these new creatures of Christ. Mariposa Prison Ministry grows heavily from this imagery—*Mariposa* is the Spanish word for butterfly.

A new heart I will give you, and a spirit I will put within you," we promised in Ezekiel 36:26. Alfredo knows this promise is true. Alfredo, motivated by what he had done to a girl while he was in a drugged state, rarely raised his head. He lived through his days trying to please everyone, himself in particular. When he was able to accept that God's payment for sin applied to him ("God forgives *me*"), a transformation began.

After much Bible study, in-depth counseling, and prayer, Alfredo was able to forgive himself and to see himself as the beloved son of God that he is. Alfredo became a new creature in Christ.

When paroled from prison, Alfredo was determined to go home, gather around his family, and, through Bible study, offer to them his newfound love and hope. Today he is married, works, attends Narcotics Anonymous weekly, and shares the love of Jesus with people in his neighborhood. He struggles to live up to his concept of a "good" Christian.

After Alfredo left prison, another student asked me, "May I join the Bible study, Mrs. Glenda? I didn't know you did very well, but I watched him struggle. I want whatever it was he learned."

My students beg me to bring them to Holy Communion. Since they are Spanish speaking and the chapel only offers English services, the Bible study is their only opportunity to receive the beloved assurances of absolute love and forgiveness in their own language. Even though we must meet in the prison's visiting hall, surrounded by very imaginable noise and dis-

traction, a sense of deep reverence and joy permeates the group every time we share together our Lord's Supper. One student commented after a celebration, "Now I feel clean for the first time in my life."

Drugs, gang rivalry, and drive-by shootings plague our society today. "Three strikes and you're out" or the prevailing attitude of society that says "lock them up and throw away the key" is not the answer. To say that "Jesus is the answer" is true but too simplistic. As Christians we must flesh out Christ's love with our own love, care, and concern for these rejected, feared, and unwanted members of society.

Almost all my students have been involved with drugs or murder. One of these "murderers" gave me a birthday card with the following message: "I want to take this time to express to you my gratitude and appreciation for all you have done for me. You hold the key which opened my heart to our Lord Jesus Christ. You opened my closed eyes to see the life I was blind to. Because of this, I wish you the very best on your special day. With all my heart, Ramon."


I can only add, "Thank you, Lord Jesus, for using Mariposa Prison Ministry as your instrument to bring light and transformation into hearts and lives." **CA**

Glenda Naegele, Ontario, Calif., is preparing for ordination at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, via the alternate route to ordination for special ministries.



Welcoming Hearts

Lydia A. Calder



The falling autumn leaves somehow symbolized my falling spirits. Thousands of miles from family and friends, my new lodging was a small, over-priced apartment in a large, impersonal city. My meager salary would be half-just paying the rent. And, as a full-time student, my husband Bob would have little energy making a financial contribution. Fancy furnishings were out of the question, fancy foods were off the menu, and owning a car was a distant dream.

Not only that, we were among strangers. It was unsettling to realize that no one in this huge city really cared. We relied only each other to cling to the wind off the Great Lakes was a harbinger of a long cold winter.

Our single ray of hope was a church that had been recommended by a friend back home.

Unfortunately, it was a long and complicated transit ride, particularly on a Sunday morning. Then a member of the church offered to be a taxi service for as long as we needed. What a blessing! He and his wife were our first links of friendship in our new church community. We were invited to a home Bible study group. This diverse and harmonious group soon made us feel comfortable, and we began to feel at home.

As Christmas neared, our new church came alive with activity. One evening our Bible study group went out as we delivered treats for neighbors. Tearful eyes greeted us at our doors, and I was struck by my responsibility as a newcomer to reach out and touch the heart of another. The Lord provides for us, that in turn can provide for others.

We also discovered in those first months that God's provisions take a very practical form. Money was a constant worry. Each month lasted far longer than my check. Although we didn't speak of our financial struggles, people quickly saw our situation and responded. One day the postman delivered an envelope containing 10 cups and 10 transit tickets. It was from heaven. We never did discover who sent it, but that anonymous person lifted our spirits for a while.

News of our inadequate furnishings traveled around the congregation.

During December, money poured in from both groups and individuals. This godsend allowed us to purchase a sofa and a coffee table, as well as a holiday feast. Truly we experienced the miracle of sharing. The financial generosity was



heartwarming, but no more so than the companionship. We were included in family celebrations and made to feel like we truly belonged. Harry and Ruth, who were 15 years older, "adopted" us, and we four soon became inseparable. We were so comfortable with one another that we could delight in an evening of quiet conversation around the kitchen table. Their door was always open and their hearts forever welcoming.

The thaw came early that spring, and on Easter Sunday we shed the winter woollies for shorts and T-shirts. Basking in the sun, I marveled at the passing of winter. The snow had been heavy, and the wind strong, but it had not been nearly so long or cold as I had feared. In fact, it was one of the warmest winters I remember. C

Lydia Calder is a freelance writer from New Westminster, British Columbia.



FIRST IN A SERIES

Human Care: LSMOs

Debra Illingworth Greene

Last year, more than one million people were served by the 250 Lutheran Social Ministry Organizations (LSMOs) that are affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

"We're one of the largest human-care delivery services in the nation, and we're uniquely large in proportion to the number of Lutherans in this country," said Gary Stubenvoll. From the ELCA's churchwide offices in Chicago, Stubenvoll is director of support to social ministry organizations.

Lutherans have a long tradition of helping others because, Stubenvoll says, "the word on Sunday morning is carried over into Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday..."

ELCA members and congregations help support Lutheran Social Ministry Organizations through their offerings. Church support, through congregations and synods, is one of the three main sources of funding for LSMOs. Two other sources of funding come from the fees people pay to receive services, and from the government, which

also pays fees for LSMO service recipients.

Lutheran Social Ministry Organizations are also supported by volunteers. Last year, 80,017 volunteers served nearly five million hours at the 250 LSMOs. You may even be one of the organizations' 80,073 employees.

Where are the ELCA's social ministry organizations? Every state in the United States—except Vermont and Rhode Island—has at least one, along with the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

And what do they do? Lutheran Social Ministry Organizations provide a wide range of services, from alcohol- and drug-dependence counseling programs, to adult day centers, to adoption services. Such Lutheran Social Ministries, such as nursing homes, provide just one service. Others provide a multitude of programs, such as the 125-year-old Lutheran Social Services of Illinois, which served 250,000 people last year.

Over the next several months, Lutheran Woman Today will feature a sampling of the social ministry services provided by Lutherans. Watch for stories about these ministries:

Second Family, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois.

Second Family helps HIV-positive parents make plans for the healthy children they eventually will have. Second Family recruits and places adoptive families, who meet and form relationships with the children. The adoptive families help children through the grieving process after their birth parents die. This unique program strives to help children out of the foster care system, helping to ease the transition from one family to another.

Are Team Ministry, Ephraim Sunset Home, Wood, Wash.

Based at a Lutheran nursing home, a new ministry forms and trains teams of volunteers. The teams help families in the community with their loved ones who have Alzheimer's and other chronic diseases. The volunteers act as a second family and provide caregivers. The care teams perform a variety of services for the patients, filling in where other help is not available.

Family Assistance Centers, Lutheran Social Services of Northern California.

These centers work with the families of people incarcerated in state prisons. The centers provide transportation, medical care, clothing exchanges and support to family members while visiting their loved ones in prison. The goal of the centers is to maintain strong family bonds, which aid in rehabilitation and reduce recidivism (falling back into crime)

when the family member is released from prison.

• **Social Ministry Outreach Project, Lutheran Social Services of New England.** This new program helps Lutheran congregations in New England identify unmet needs in their communities.



Then the program helps the congregations in developing new social ministry programs to meet those needs. The project helps Lutherans at the local level serve their neighbors in need.

If you would like more information about a program, or if you'd like to know more about Lutheran Social Ministry Organizations in your area, contact Gary Stubenvoll in the ELCA's Division for Church in Society, at 1-800-638-3522, ext. 2684. **CAG**

Debra Illingworth Greene is a freelance writer who lives in Madison, Wis., with her husband and infant son.

The Ants Go Marching

Jennifer Young Jar



I have ants. In my kitchen, that is, but somehow I take it personally that the creatures I have chosen my kitchen, of all places, for their new convention center.

And my husband just doesn't comprehend the gravity of the situation. As I reach for the glass cleaner, he shoots yet another of the tiny irritants. He sings, "The ants go marching by one, hurrah, hurrah..." until I give him the look normally reserved for mischievous children and point the spray bottle at him.

I try every safe and reasonable method I know to rid my house of ants: ant baits, lemon juice on the trails, you name it. I learned the glass cleaner trick from an aunt who has a friend who knows someone who knows about ants. "Glass cleaner kills ants," my aunt tells me. I later discover that it kills only the ants on which it is directly sprayed. I hesitate to use insecticide, which might be more effective, because I'm concerned about the effects of the spray on my infant daughter. I also reject a friend's suggestion that I acquire a pair of nippers for my kitchen.

I'm particularly concerned about

ants as I prepare for a baby shower in my home. When I explain plight to my friend Linda, who es early to help me get ready, nods understandingly and tells about her ant experience in h Florida. Her family had just ed into a new, concrete block se when they saw ants stream- out of every crevice in the house, uding the electrical sockets. She lly discovered that ants were wn to the half-empty soft drinks t the construction workers had ed into the holes of the blocks as y built the house. There was lit- that Linda could do about the s, short of tearing down the se, block by block. Hearing this, struggle (mostly unsuccessfully) ut my situation in perspective.

Soon the baby shower guests arrive, and talk immediately turns to difficult-labor and ugly-baby stories. In sympathy for the expectant mother, I mpt to change the subject. The sts apparently have only one er topic on their minds, however: gusting creatures. As the conver- on turns to snakes, bats, and (of rse) ants, I realize I should have ned baby-shower games for us lay.

I wonder why I am so irritated the ants in my kitchen. It is onvenient to have to wash each a both before and after eating on Naturally, I would prefer to keep food in the kitchen cabinets ner than upstairs in the guest n. Perhaps the real reason for frustration is that I'm afraid my sts will think I'm a poor house- per when they see the ants

parading across my kitchen counter. But should someone who survived Hurricane Hugo, suffered through (and passed!) bar exams in two states, and endured 68 hours of labor in childbirth worry about a few ants?

I recall my devotional reading from a few days before the baby shower. Paul wrote in Hebrews 10:23, "Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful." The passage reminds me of God's faithfulness and encourages me to consider the nature of the hope I profess. I realize once again that my hope is not in living an easy life or making a good impression on my guests, but in trusting in Christ. The Bible calls Christ our hope, the anchor for our souls. I begin to grab hold of the idea of Christ as a solid anchor on which believers can rely, whether our troubles are large or ant-size.

I continue to struggle with the ants that have moved in with my family. I attempt to cope with the problem through humor, occasional anger, and a shot of glass cleaner now and then. I'm beginning to put this minor problem into perspective, though, and to see God more clearly. As God helps me concentrate on those things of life that are more important than ants in my kitchen, I hold on to one more happy thought: surely there will be no ants in heaven. **C**

Jennifer Young Jarrett, Holden, Mass., is temporarily retired from a career as an attorney and is now a homemaker, raising a daughter and son. P.S. The family has moved from "the ant house."

St. Paul's Teacher

Colleen Nordhausen-Garton

Every time I reminisce about that little white church in the country with the grand steeple tower and the ringing of the Sunday morning bells, I think of the strength of the women I knew there. What great teachers they were. It seemed that despite the trials in their own lives, the stumbling blocks they had to hurdle, the light of Jesus was always, always, there in great measure.

I was a young bride in those early years, and they seemed great saints of wisdom. Each one was so strong about what she believed and about how she wanted to live her life and guide the lives of her children for the Lord.

The devil must have quaked at the thought of that little white church in the country with the music of the organ and piano rattled the rafters in praise to God, and the prayers poured from the hearts of the people. I thought it was all perfect, in those days.

Now I am much older, and having walked through trials and tribulations myself, I realize there were, in that little white church in the country, struggling marriages, rebellious children, and alcohol abuse...whatever was there in that fallen world. Those in the church had—and have—their burdens. The difference is how the burdens are carried.

The women at St. Paul's were women of victory over their trials and, oh, how they supported each other in prayer. From the oldest to the very youngest, they carried each other in their trials. They were bound together in bonds of love (Ecclesiastes 4).

I thank God for Esther and Charlene and Marge and all the other powerful teachers. Their example is still a great measure of the strength of my faith. When I read in Isaiah 30:20 (NIV), "Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your eyes you will see them," I will always be reminded of those powerful prayer warriors, my teachers at St. Paul's.

Lord, I wish to be one of those teachers. Use me. **C**

Colleen Nordhausen-Garton, Loveland, Colo., is a freelance writer. She and her husband, Ben, are leaders in their local church youth group.

Adieu, Terry

Kathryn E. Kopf



y Schutz died cancer. Not that wasn't expected. —Dorothy Apple, Lois Ler, and I—all ds from the er staff of heran Church en, had seen ust three weeks before, and she clearly very ill. But she was, as ys, a gracious hostess and oy to show off her new apart- ot far from her office at Johns kins Press in Baltimore. Now ere headed back to Baltimore er funeral and burial.

Terry was the last editor of *Lutheran Women* magazine (a predecessor of *Lutheran Woman* ay). She was responsible for its ent, production, and distribu- Her love of language, her sense stice, and her keen eye for sto- resulted in many awards for the azine. Her no-nonsense roach made her an excellent ager.

Terry came to Philadelphia from ditorial position in New York, lived in a center-city apartment n her two cats. When her mother ed, they bought a house and d together. Many of us enjoyed arrangement, as we shared r warm hospitality and wonder- neals. When one of the cats died,

Terry added an exuberant Belgian sheepdog to the household, and soon after another Belgian sheepdog. Terry had lived briefly in France and loved the country and its

language. Hence the names of some of her animals: Noel, Beau, Belle.

With her move to a new home, Terry also found a new church, St. Martin in the Fields. Joining the choir opened her to friends who were to be a strong support in the coming years.

After leaving Lutheran Church Women, Terry spent several years freelancing before becoming an editor for Johns Hopkins Press. In Baltimore, she fell while walking her dogs. A resulting persistent pain led to the discovery of her cancer. She kept going till her death, finding support in old friends and the caring church family of St. Martin's.

It's still hard to believe Terry died, but we rejoice in her life and thank God for the talents she shared with us through *Lutheran Women* magazine. C

Kathryn E. Kopf, Philadelphia, Pa., served as executive director of Lutheran Church Women from 1976 to 1987.

Remembering

On a cold, clear February day I visited the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. Despite all the times I have been in Washington, I had never seen the memorial, and so I chose this day to make my pilgrimage.

I walked for what seemed like miles to get there, wondering all the while what impact this special place would have for me.

It was not quite as I expected. Others had told me, "There are always hundreds of people there." "People leave flowers and other offerings." "There are always people tracing the names of their loved ones."

I saw none of this—no flowers, no offerings, no one tracing names. I saw about two dozen people, Americans and international visitors, walking by the monument in silence and reverence.

The memorial is a long stone wall, not visible from the street, inscribed with the names of those Americans who died fighting in Vietnam from 1959 to 1975, "in the order in which they were taken from us." Darden and daSilva, Ficara and Sorensen, the names stretch out along the wall and unite



forever those who were stranger to life.

Martin and Martinez, Johansen Wong—the names continue on and on. Dooley and Doran. "Is my daddy's name here?" a little girl asked as I walked. "No, honey, but your grandpa's name is Grezman, Grigori Polesetsky, Lezhnev. A nation says to

you in this memorial, "built by the contributions of the American people."

A little way apart is another monument, this one to the women who served and those who died in Vietnam. Here there are no names, only statues of women holding the wounded, caring for others, looking to the sky for the next attack.

Ficara, daSilva, Martin Gribler, and the unnamed women. I did not know any of them, but I pay silent tribute to them and realize that they were my sons and daughters, my brothers and sisters as they were yours.

Let us pray that we never have to go to war again, that our sons and our daughters never have to return to arms again, and that we and they will know peace at last. **C**

Charlotte E. Fiechter
Executive Director

TC Scholarships

It's less than a year away! The Women of the ELCA Triennial Convention will be in the Twin Cities Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minn., in ten days! The dates are 11-14, 1996. Are you planning to go there?



In the spring of this year, your congregation received a packet of information that gave a host of details about this exciting event. The theme, "Proclaim God's Peace," is based on Ephesians 6:15b, which says... "Put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace." Worship and Bible study will center on this theme. A Convention Without Walls program will also offer experiences to enhance the theme. Workshops are designed to offer personal growth experiences, as well as organizational knowledge. The convention exhibit area, called the Proclamation Station, will boast interactive exhibits, information about peace, and some surprises. There will be many, many opportunities to learn, experience, and share with thousands of others. Enjoy the singing!

Attending a triennial convention is a tremendous opportunity. Women of the ELCA has a scholarship fund available to encourage participation by those

women who do not have enough financial resources for this experience. (Participating in the triennial convention will cost approximately \$500 for your registration, hotel, food, and some

spending money. You must add the cost of transportation from your area to this base amount.)

Women who are members of ELCA congregations, have a history of participation in the women's organization, are in need of financial assistance, and meet the application deadline requirements, may request up to \$500 in assistance. Recipients may not be relatives of churchwide Women of the ELCA board members or staff.

If you meet these requirements, write for an application at the address below. The completed application is due February 15, 1996. (Check with representatives from your congregational unit, synod, and/or SWO to see if additional scholarship programs are available through these sources.)

Will you be there? We hope so. For an application write today to: Triennial Convention Scholarships, Women of the ELCA, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4189.

*Beckie M. Steele
Director for Leadership
Development*

* *Triennial Convention Twin Cities*

Celebrating Literacy Month

The Power of the Word

Jane E. Strohl

As a child, I loved to be read to. Going to the public library, picking out books for my mother to bring home, and laying claim to her undivided attention as we sat together on the sofa and she shared with me the world of words—this was central to our family routine.

Then one Easter, tucked next to my basket of candy, was a book titled *A Fly Went By*. (It is still in print to these many years later!) My mother remembers how I ran about announcing excitedly, “I can read this!” I was able to experience the power of words for myself in a new way.

I now am blessed with a two-year-old daughter, Lucy, whose most clearly articulated words (besides “no”) are “another book.” One recent evening I was in the kitchen, delayed from beginning our story hour on schedule. When I emerged, I found Lucy sitting contentedly, turning the pages of a pudgy board book about Bert and Ernie, the popular odd couple from the children’s show *Sesame Street*. She was putting the right words with the pictures, almost as if she were reading the text: “Ernie can laugh. Bert can

cry. Bert can throw; Ernie catch.”

In not too many years, she will come home from church, as my mother once did, a delighted first grader in proud possession of her own Bible. And before long she will be reading for herself about Isaac and Saul, Mary and Martha and Jesus and his disciples.

Human beings are creatures of words. We grow by learning the power of having words—first to speak and then to read. A friend of mine has a son 11 months older than my daughter. We stayed at Holden Village (Clatsop County, Wash.) last summer. When Lucy was frustrated or distressed, she shrieked. When Thomas looked cool, his mother would encourage him, “Use your words. Tell me what you need.” What a difference being able to speak made. Thomas could give a name to what he felt and felt.

Just as language allows us to name our world, reading gives us access to all kinds of knowledge and ideas. From deciphering application or directions on a prescription medicine to reading a piece of legislation or meditation

...m, reading connects us with
world and allows us to enter
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declares to us God's
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And we speak in
a: "Lord, I believe,
thou my unbelief"

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f the Lord; let it be
me according to
word" or "Amen."

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is "the priesthood
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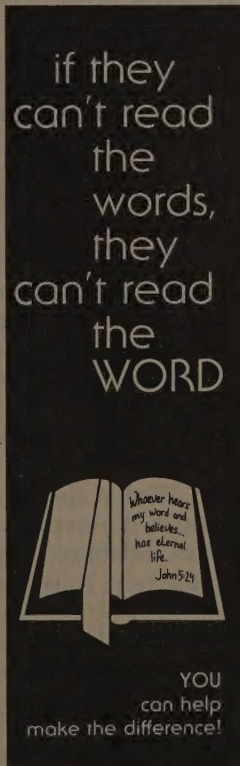
you with me. Therefore every one
must himself know and be armed
with the chief things which concern
a Christian."*

Every one of us is called to
make her or his own confession of
faith. The effect of baptism is to
make us all priests, that is, persons
empowered and charged to search
the Scriptures, test the proclama-
tion of our community for its faith-
fulness to the gospel,
offer prayers before God
for the needs of our
world, and do the work
of an evangelist. To
make our confession
and to fulfill our priest-
hood we need the power
of words.

And a very basic
way to care for our
neighbors is to help
them acquire the power
of words. To work for lit-
eracy for all is simple
justice and sound disci-
pleship. **A**

*Jane E. Strohl is associ-
ate professor of church
history at Luther
Seminary, St. Paul,
Minn. She served as
pastor of St. John
Lutheran Church in
Brooklyn, Conn.*

* From Martin Luther's *Basic
Theological Writings*,
Fortress Press, 1989.



The earth was parched, thirsty. Winds sucked in every drop of moisture. Patio plants drooped, worn from fighting the desert wind. Yes, the earth was parched, but so was I. Identifying with our dusty patio, I too felt covered with dust. That week I was in too much wind. A whirlwind.

Rain On Me

Vivian Elaine Johnson

You know what it was like. Days filled with too many people, too many words, too many activities. Turmoil blew in from many directions. Soft, gentle breezes gave way to forceful winds of attack. A deluge kicked up loose dust, enveloping, choking. Like a desert sandstorm, still

the exposed skin of my vulnerable self.

Wait. What was that on the patio? A few drops. More. More. Steady, rhythmic droplets covered the cement. The dust came. The flowers drank. The dust fled as the earth basked in heaven's life-giving fluid. Leaves, blossoms, grass, cement...all shining in liquid freshness.

I envied them. Oh, God, rain on my desert. Rain on me. I were a child I'd run out and play in the rain. Play in the rain. Could I...should I...why not?

I put on my boots, flung open the door, and heard myself say, "Here I come...ready or not!"

I was a child again. A child in my own backyard. Lifting my face to the sky, the wet drops washed, cleansed me. All the dust of that week went streaming to the ground. Tears came, then rain. Tears. Opening my mouth, raindrops found their way down my parched throat, cooling and loosening its tightness. Water to drink! Water dripped from nose, chin, elbows. My hair was soaked. Fun! Tears turned to chuckles.

Puddles beckoned. Lifting one foot, plop. Another one. Plop. Again...and again. What a splash! Water found its way into my boots. Toes wiggled in the wetness. My glee was that of a child. (Were my neighbors watching?) It was wonderful! Walking, running, playing in the rain. I was refreshed, replenished, satisfied like the leaves.

Later, wrapped in a bathrobe and drying my hair with a towel, I recalled Peter's words to Jesus: "Wash me, Lord. Not just my feet, but all of me."

I had read those words before. Now I understood them.

Vivian Elaine Johnson, Cambridge, Minn., is the co-creator of "Life Stories," a communications game, as well as other games.

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